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National
Foreign
Assessment
Center

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Current Intelligence Weekly Summary

5 May 1978

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The WEEKLY SUMMARY, issued every Friday morning by the Current Reporting Group, reports and analyzes significant developments of the week through noon on Thursday. It frequently includes material coordinated with or prepared by the Office of Regional and Political Analysis, the Office of Economic Research, the Office of Strategic Research, the Office of Scientific Intelligence, the Office of Weapons Intelligence, and the Office of Geographic and Cartographic Research.

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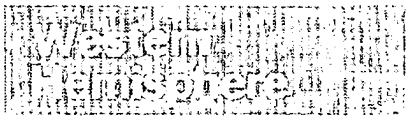

ARGENTINA

A decision this week by Argentina's ruling junta to extend President Videla's term and remove the office of the presidency from the junta has temporarily papered over a longstanding dispute over the organization of the government. The move leaves the role and powers of the presidential office unclarified and probably presages a period of intense maneuvering within the military.

The junta announced on 2 May that Videla, the Army commander, will retire from active duty by 1 August but remain as chief executive until March 1981. Technically, Videla will serve as a civilian president, although his constituency will clearly be the military. Navy and Air Force members of the junta are also slated to retire by this fall.

The announcement left unclear the crucial question of whether the presidency will be subordinate to or independent of the junta. Videla wants to strengthen the office but has been consistently opposed by junta member Admiral Massera, commander of the Navy. Massera's intransigence is perhaps the main reason the decision was so long in coming; the issue had been hotly debated for well over a year.

The politically ambitious Massera has been severely critical of Videla's style of leadership. Massera has consistently used his junta position and popularity within the Navy to block Videla's initiative and generate opposition to him, in and out of the Navy.

Since the action required a unanimous junta vote, it may have involved some conciliatory gesture toward Massera. He may, for example, have been promised some change in the government's economic policy, of which he has been a vocal critic. Or, he may simply have concluded that having apparently failed in his effort to win the support of the Air Force junta member, he had no alterative but to go along.

The issue may not be dead. Massera and other dissidents probably do not have the power to undo the changes, but they could hamper the effectiveness of the revamped presidency.

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